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ART AND PROGRESS

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THE ENJOYMENT OF ART

That human beings ordinarily endowed with intelligence should have to be taught to enjoy art is passing strange. A taste for olives is said to be chiefly cultivated, but on the whole man does not have to be taught to enjoy his dinner. And yet it is the power to appreciate beauty, to find enjoyment in the immaterial things of life that differentiates man from the beasts. To be sure the more one knows of a given subject the more interesting as a rule that subject becomes, but this refers more especially to intellectual matter than to those things making direct esthetic appeal. To stand before a painting and inquire the reason for its charm, is like endeavoring to analyze the beauty of a flower. We do not maintain that there is not an interest in paintings and sculpture which is technical, even historical, but what we do affirm is that the enjoyment of these works comes primarily from their esthetic appeal which can not be reduced to formula or discovered by rule.

One of the State Federations of Women's

Clubs has lately issued a circular giving suggestions for picture study, which, while excellent in its way, presupposes the necessity of instruction in the enjoyment of paintings and the possibility of giving such instruction by printed word. It says in part: "Enjoyment should be the first aim and result of the study of a picture. The way to get this enjoyment is to look at the picture long and carefully; look for the beauty in it rather than the faults. Close your eyes and try to visualize it as a whole; recall what impresses you most; fix in your mind the message that comes to you from the canvas. Do this again and again in the presence of the picture, until you have a definite mental image of it." Now the question which naturally arises in the mind of the reader is obviously, Why should one go to so much trouble to acquire something the value of which is completely unknown until experienced? Why should one persistently and painfully eat olives which one does not crave at all to eventually acquire a taste which one is told is agreeable? We are a practical people and so are willing to strive for that which will directly profit us, for that knowledge which we may put to practical use. But why labor to acquire the power of enjoyment which by rights should be inherent?

Furthermore, is it really possible to thus acquire this invaluable power? Can one be taught to enjoy a sunset by being told how the effect is produced and what the laws of harmony in color are? Is it not the contagion of enjoyment alone which imparts it? Is not the most direct means of imparting this faculty the gospel message of the Seer—"Come and see." We can not love art, or man, or even God, because we should, and as a rule the more we strive from a pure sense of duty the further we get from our goal. It is not rules, it is not reason that opens the door of enjoyment of art to those who are blind, but the guiding hand of one who has already entered in and knows how to share the secret of a spontaneous all-delightful enthusiasm.

The Lion and Serpent group reproduced on page 364 of the August number of ART AND PROGRESS should have been attributed to Arthur Putnam, a California sculptor, instead of to Brenda Putnam, of New York.